

# **IDAHO VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**

October 4, 2007

Pursuant to agreement, a meeting of the Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission was held in the conference room at the Idaho State Veterans Home – Boise, Thursday, October 4, 2007, for the purpose of reviewing program reports and other items of business.

**Present:** Commissioner, Donald Riegel, Chairman  
Commissioner, Ken Pitcher, Vice Chairman  
Commissioner Frank Richardson  
Commissioner Barbara Thurlow  
David Brasuell, Administrator, IDVS  
Dan Claar, Human Resource Assistant, IDVS  
Debbie Spence, Financial Specialist Principal, IDVS  
Jim Adams, Administrative Support Manager, IDVS  
James Roberts, Administrator, IDVH – Boise  
Clark Graebel, Administrator, IDVH – Lewiston  
Tom Ressler, Office of Veterans Advocacy  
Zach Rodriguez, Director, Veterans Cemetery  
Tammy Hebdon, Administrative Assistant 2, IDVS

Chairman Don Riegel called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

## **INTRODUCTION OF GUEST:**

Mike Grigsby-Military Order of Purple Heart-invited Commissioners to the October 13, 2007 MOPH Region 3 and Region 6 Combined Meeting and Training. The training will begin at 9:00 a.m., and will be held at the Best Western Vista Inn at the Airport (next to the Copper Kitchen) in Boise. Mike is now the Regional Commander of MOPH, overseeing the eight West Coast states, all of which will have representation at this meeting.

Trent Hanson, IDVS Information Technology (IT) Coordinator

Administrator David Brasuell introduced Larry Budd (IT), Sonya LaCasse (Finance), and Dan Claar (HR). Larry comes to the Division with a wide background in the IT field, and will help with the overflow in the IT Department. Sonya been here before and comes with a great wealth of knowledge. Dan Claar was added to help SLT take on all the new tasks and responsibilities resulting from the devolvement of DHR.

Zach Rodriguez was welcomed as the new Idaho State Veterans Cemetery Director.

Deke Johnson, VFW National Council and Quartermaster and Bob Finney, VFW Adjutant, both stopped in for a brief time.

### **APPROVAL OF THE JULY 2007 IDAHO VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES:**

Commissioner Ken Pitcher moved that the Commission dispense with the reading of the July 2007 minutes and approve them as written. Commissioner Frank Richardson seconded the motion; motion carried.

### **IDAHO DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY UPDATE:**

Trent Hanson, the IT Coordinator, provided the Commission with an update on what's happening within the IT department. As of today, 162 boxes have been delivered, providing four new servers, nine new laptops and 62 new desktop computers. The IT department is currently loading all the necessary software and once this is completed each of the computers and laptops will be disbursed to their new users.

The four new servers are San Solution servers, which will provide the Division with a faster, more reliable backup system. The current server requires tape backups, which often break, causing lost data. Additionally, when a restoration was necessary, this system took 24 hours to become functional again. The new system will allow this process to be completed in four hours. The new servers have all been relocated to their new location-the room that used to be the maintenance office. The three existing server racks are 80% populated with servers, and are better protected and contained in this location.

The 62 new workstations are all part of the Divisions five year plan for workstation replacement. By replacing these workstations, they will now all be covered under warranty replacement, resulting in reducing costs when they need to either be fixed or replaced.

The Request For Proposal (RFP) for the "CareTracker" type system is a work in progress. Plans are to get the RFP finished and out for vendors to bid on within the next two weeks. Once in place, this type of system will help record clinical data, track ancillary costs and acuity scores, all of which will be vital in the new Medicare process.

Trent also told the Commission that he is working on getting the Medicare required TTD line system installed in all three homes. Once this process is completed, the homes should have successfully complied with all of the Medicare requirements, thus allowing the approval process to move ahead.

The final project that IT is working on is the re-routing of all cabling in the Homes.

### **IDAHO DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES HUMAN RESOURCES:**

Dan Claar provided the Commission with an update on the happenings within Human Resources.

To date, there are 267 classified employees, 100 temporary employees and 4 Board members. Dan informed the Commission that so far this year, turnover rates are as follows: Division Office is at 9.71%, OVA is at 0%, Cemetery at 14.3%, Boise Home at 21.65%, Pocatello Home at 14.95%, and Lewiston Home at 11.96% (national average in homes is 65%+). Everyone is doing really well! A thought as to why the turnover rate is so low has to do with the fact that IDVS was able to give out substantial pay increases this past year.

On the subject of turnover, Dan let the Commission know that he is reviewing exit interviews to help identify reasons for employees leaving. Based on the information he has reviewed so far, the top four reasons for leaving state employment are: Better Job, Other, Personal and Dismissal. The major area of concern is the “Other” category. Unfortunately, this category does not provide any useful information, nor does it help identify problems or concerns. As this is the type of information that is used to help substantiate the need for increase in salaries, and convince the legislature (JFAC) that we need to increase wages to retain employees, it is vital that supervisors/human resource staff dig a bit deeper and try to find out the real reason an employee left. Dan suggested that when the Home Administrators are reviewing this information they flag the “other” responses and return them to the correct staff member to obtain more definitive information. The question of what to enter when the leaving employee indicates more than one reason was raised. It was Dan’s suggestion that the supervisor be questioned, and maybe some fellow employees, to see if they have a better understanding of why the employee really left. If not, then Dan suggested that the best choice would be Compensation, as it would help support the need for increases in pay. It was also suggested that the categories of Better Job and Compensation may be the same thing, so the HR staff should try to better narrow that down to which one it really was—if a better job, does that mean better hours/commuting distance, or does it mean better money. If the latter, then the employees reason for leaving should be coded as Compensation.

Brief discussion was held on the importance of capturing accurate data—make sure the supervisor has a good understanding of why the employee left. May need to ask around to co-workers and see what the real reasons are for staff leaving.

Dan updated the Commission on the changes that have occurred since the DHR dissolution. The Division has now signed Memorandums Of Understanding with DHR, which means we are now responsible for HR functions. The Division will now be creating job announcements, generating and providing hiring lists, publications of job listings, attending recruiting fairs, etc. Recently Dan attended a career fair in Northern

Idaho/Eastern Washington, and realized that the Division really doesn't have current career information pamphlets. As a result, he will start working on developing some new ones. Ideas on these pamphlets should be sent to Dan. Also, if there are any career fairs/job fairs that Dan should attend, please let him know and he will attend all that he can. Getting our information out into the market will help provide a wider pool of candidates to recruit from.

The other area that IDVS must take over is that of Training. Susan Lowman-Thomas sent out an email asking for input on training needs. Input from those who need training is necessary as Susan and Dan do not know everyone's needs. Please let them know if you have a training need. Susan is now part of a statewide advisory board that is working with the Professional Technical Education Offices and BSU to help identify training needs, and resources. This should help provide a wide array of training options for state employees.

Dan pointed out that the Workers Comp claims appear to be on a downhill slide. It appears that the increase in training, along with the purchase of more lifts, has helped reduce the number and types of injuries. This downhill trend is important, and will be instrumental in decreasing workers compensation charges in the future. It was pointed out that the very high workers comp claims from 2006 will continue to impact the Divisions rates for two more years, after which, if the current trend continues, the Division should see a decrease in the 2009 rates.

Recently the State Controller Office provided agencies information on the high cost of producing and mailing out paper paychecks. Due to this cost, it was suggested that all state agencies work to get their employees to use direct deposit - paperless paystubs. To date, most of the Division employees have opted to go paperless. Supervisors and HR personnel are encouraged to continue to suggest to those employees still receiving an actual check to consider going paperless. As this is not mandatory, it is still the employee's decision, and undue pressure should not be used.

Dan brought the Commission up-to-date on activities Patti Murphy, the Public Information Officer, has been working on. Since the July Commission meeting, Patti has provided public exposure on the opening of the new Idaho State Veterans Cemetery Information Center, announcements on the upcoming Missing In America service, and a story on Jerry Bob Shafter, who was a resident and volunteer at the Boise Home. Patti is currently working on a news story about the Boise Home Therapy Department, the development of the IDVS web site, and various other media projects.

Effective October 1, 2008, Governor Otter issued a directive ordering all state agencies to verify new employees meet the requirements to be legally employed in the United States. Susan Lowman-Thomas and Tammy Hebdon have attended training on the new federal Employment Eligibility Verification program, and have provided training to the HR representatives at each of the Veterans Homes. By using this system, immediate verification is received for those employees authorized to work in the U.S., as well as immediate notification to both the employer and the employee if there is an issue with the

employee's eligibility to work. Methods of resolution are provided, and it is the employee's responsibility to resolve the issues and provide proof. This system is easy to use and provides immediate verification, thus assuring that only those employees eligible to work in the U.S. are employed. IDVS is in full and complete compliance with Governor Otter's directive.

Clark Graebel, Lewiston Home Administrator, thanked Dan for providing the reports he sends each month, as he has been sharing them with his management team; they have been very receptive to that information. Clark asked Dan to continue providing the information. Dan assured that he would, and also let the Commission know that if there is any additional information needed to just let him know and he will try to get that information.

Commissioner Richardson wanted to know if there was a known reason for all of the "other" responses, and wondered if it had anything to do with failure to respond. Dan explained that he wasn't positive, but he suspected that when employees don't respond they are put into the "other" category. It is Dan's recommendation that when this happens, the supervisor and/or HR personnel could analyze the information they have heard from the "talk on the floor" or observations, and that may lead to a better explanation of why the employee left. Clark Graebel indicated that he will take this information back to his HR personnel and work with them so they better understand the reasons for not accepting "other" as an explanation for leaving, and advise them to dig deeper if that shows up on an exit interview.

Commissioner Riegel wanted to know how the Division handles the "compensation" reasons. Dan informed the Commission that, since he is new to IDVS, he is not exactly sure how this is handled. He did explain that part of the problem for State agencies is the control the Legislature has over compensation and the inability to "just throw money" at the position and make it better, which is what private industry can do. David Brasuell indicated that over the past couple of years higher pay increases has gone more to the higher turnover/lower pay jobs, in an attempt to move them closer to the median, and help reduce turnover. There has been some improvement, but more still needs to be done.

In the past there has been discussion about pay raises and bonus for employees who go above and beyond, and Commissioner Riegel wanted to know if that happens, and what the process is to do this. Zach Rodriguez, Cemetery Director, and Tom Ressler, OVA Supervisor assured Commissioner Riegel that several of their staff members received bonuses this past year. David Brasuell informed the Commission that before any of this takes place, he meets with Debbie Spence, reviews the budget to identify the dollar amount available, and then works closely with Susan Lowman-Thomas to assure correct human resource procedures are followed.

## **IDAHO DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES FINANCIAL REPORT:**

Debbie Spence provided the Commission with an update on the financial position of IDVS.

To begin with, the Year to Date Per Diem average for Nursing is \$201.14, with an Occupancy Rate average of 87.1 %. For DOM, the Year to Date Per Diem average is \$66.96, and the Occupancy Rate average is 86.1 %. Debbie reminded the Commission that marketing is a crucial part of keeping the occupancy rates up, and asked that everyone, including the Commissioners to please remember that and take advantage of every opportunity to market the homes.

Currently the Division is operating well within the current Operating Budget. In the FY09 Budget Proposal, IDVS is asking for two (2) supplementals: one is for the implementation of Medicare (\$905,900, which includes the addition of federal funding and decreases the miscellaneous receipts). The second supplemental is to fund the physical relocation of the Division offices (\$104,300). The FY09 Budget Request is for \$35,509,000, which is an increase of \$980,700 over the FY08 budget (\$100,500 (5.8%) increase in general funds). This increase will be used to replace vehicles, computer equipment, dining and kitchen equipment, lifts, beds, etc., as well as to help move the nursing and dietary jobs closer to the market median . However, the funding is always based on occupancy rates, so Debbie reiterated the need to market the homes and keep the numbers high.

Commissioner Riegel wanted to know the Medicare outlook? Specifically, when do we expect the Boise and Pocatello Homes to be ready to accept Medicare residents? David Brasuell informed the Commissioners that right now the hold up is the installation of the TTD (hearing impaired) phone lines. Once they are in place (and the installation is being scheduled at this time), the estimated time frame for the intermediary to send the application on to the state controlling agency is 4-6 weeks. Dave also shared that it was recently discovered that the last time a Medicare application was many years ago, and most of the staff who understood the process have left, so this is a “new” process for most of the agencies involved and is taking a bit longer than anticipated.

Commissioner Richardson asked Debbie if IDVS tracks money left over from positions not filled? Debbie answered yes, prompting Commissioner Richardson to ask what happens to that at the end of the year: Debbie explained that any money not used for salary increases or bonus is returned back to the state fund - we lose it. Commissioner Richardson wanted to know what IDVS could do to avoid giving money back? Debbie explained that since our funding is based on occupancy it is very important that we not give out money that may not be there the next year. For example, if a raise (which is a permanent, on-going expense) is given to an employee using part of that “left over money”, and it is later determined that because of an increase in occupancy additional permanent staff is needed, the necessary funding may not be available to pay their salary. Dave Brasuell added that since pay raises are permanent and on-going, most of the salary savings money that is generated from employees leaving and new employees being hired at lower rates, is used to award bonuses. This is what happened this past year.

**QUESTION/ANSWER PERIOD ON THE VETERANS HOMES, THE OFFICE OF VETERANS ADVOCACY AND THE STATE VETERANS CEMETERY FY05 THIRD QUARTER OPERATIONS REPORTS:**

**Pocatello Veterans Home Operations Report:**

Brent Schneider provided the Commission with a handout on an upcoming leadership retreat that Donita Christenson has arranged. On October 11, 2007, "The Essential Piece" will address issues such as synergy and energy, positive/negative vibes, leadership concepts, and other such topics. Everyone is very excited about it, and Donita plans to hold another retreat in February/March for the CNAs, which she will split into two days to allow all to attend.

The Pocatello Home receipts continue to be collected. However, due to a Medicaid claims adjustment, almost \$200,000 was withheld. This amount has been rebilled and the funds should be reimbursed within a few weeks. This was due to a rate adjustment from Medicaid.

Census continues to be a concern. Brent is pursuing more marketing options (commercials, news media (paper/tv)), is attending more veterans and civic group meetings, has been doing more presentations, and the OVA group doing presentations as well. The challenge in the Pocatello area is the competition. There are several assisted living facilities and nursing homes, and there is a new 40 bed private room/private pay nursing home opening. Brent believes that the inception of Medicare should help with the census, as currently the Pocatello Home loses residents when they have to go somewhere else to use their Medicare benefits: they get comfy and don't want to leave.

Brent was proud to inform the Commission that the Pocatello Home has received the Schoonover award. This is an award given to health care providers, based on the types of services provided and how well they are provided. The actual award will be presented October 19, 2007 at 2:30 p.m. This type of recognition does not happen without the individual care of every employee, so each of them will be recognized at the ceremony and will each receive a pin and certificate.

On September 1, 2007, the new Pocatello Home pharmacy contract began. The new pharmacist is very cooperative and appears to want to learn the system. The Salt Lake City VAMC has offered to work with and train the new pharmacist. The Pocatello Home is already seeing a decrease in pharmacy costs.

The areas of food service, laundry and housekeeping are all doing well. The new housekeeping contract has been awarded. However, the award is being appealed.

The Garage Project is almost completed. Brent reminded the Commission that the original completion date was set for October 11, 2007, but there have been a few minor material delays, which have caused the completion date to be pushed out about a week.

Thanks to the commitment and networking of Carey Hebdon, the Pocatello Home Volunteer Hours continue to rise. In order to better identify types of volunteer hours, the Clinical Training Hours are now being split out of the total volunteer hours. This split allows easier identification of the number of hours being used to train LPNs and CNAs, thus providing hard evidence of how the Pocatello Home is partnering with the university. Currently there are eight employees at the Pocatello Home who were trained there, showing that this training information is important to help identify recruiting efforts.

Over the past quarter, the Pocatello Home has participated in various activities, all of which have included great community support and assistance. The residents have gone on fishing trips, participated in the POW/MIA Root beer Float Afternoon, welcomed American Legion National Commander Paul Morin when he came to tour, and participated in the annual Veterans Olympics.

Community Support continues to be strong. The POW/MIA Annual Awareness Rally was held this past quarter, with bikers from all over coming to Pocatello. The Rally was held at the Pocatello Home, and resulted in this group handing over an \$8000 check. In addition to that donation, the group held a 50/50 raffle, and the person who won the pot donated all of his \$300 winnings to the home. The highlight of this event is the scones kitchen, which made scones for all of the 140 bikers and residents. This was a very successful event and enjoyed by everyone. Among other community support, the Blackfoot Elks Lodge holds a Steak Dinner fundraiser every three months and they donate all of the funds collected to the Pocatello Home. Brent informed the Commission that they have been given a certificate of appreciation.

Brent indicated that the nursing hours are staying within the budget, but at times this is tricky. The reason for that is due to the fact that most of the employees are classified employees, therefore they cannot be sent home when the census is down. In an attempt to help lessen that burden, Brent reported that when positions become empty due to employees leaving, they are not filled. This has helped keep nursing hours down, as well as reduce agency hours, which have been at ZERO for the past three months. An additional component to the decrease in agency hours has been the splitting of a RN position between two employees who each wanted to work part-time.

The Pocatello Home sent out their annual survey. Fifty-four surveys were sent out and thirty were returned. The returned surveys indicated 28 ratings of excellent/very good.

Thanks to the commitment and diligence of Jim Root, Maintenance Supervisor, the Pocatello Home was able to save \$1800.00 during the boiler inspections. This savings is a direct result of Jim being able to take the boilers down prior to the inspection, and then put them back together afterwards. Employees like Jim, who are vested in their job, are



essential to the Pocatello Home. As Jim will be retiring in the next two years, Brent has hired a maintenance assistant, Dale Clayton, who will be working with and training under Jim. Having this knowledge base available, Dale should be well trained and ready to take over upon Jim's retirement.

Commissioner Richardson noticed that in August it appears that meals cost jumped almost \$3, and wondered why. Brent explained that during the summer months there are several extra meals (BBQ's, etc), which result in higher costs. However, Brent also pointed out that if the Commission were to look at the year-to-date numbers, meals are still within the normal ranges.

The new parking garage at the Pocatello Home was supposed to be done the first week of the month, and Commissioner Richardson wanted to know the status? Brent responded that it should be finished by November 11, 2007. The delay is due to one of the subcontractors running out of a necessary metal seam, and the supplier indicated it would be two weeks before the shipment arrived. Overall, Brent reports that the contractor and architect on this project have been excellent and the work has been kept on schedule, and there have not been any overruns; actually, the contract came in way under expected costs. To that end, Commissioner Richardson was concerned about the quality of work, which Brent assured him has been excellent.

Commissioner Riegel asked Brent if he could explain the appeal process for the housekeeping contract. Brent asked Debbie Spence to explain, and Debbie informed the Commission that since this contract is a DPW contract, state statute indicates that anyone not receiving a contract they bid on has ten (10) days to appeal that decision. During the appeal the bids are looked at again, the decision on who gets awarded the contract is reviewed and the final decision is issued by DPW. At this time, the Pocatello Housekeeping contract is being appealed, so it will have to be reviewed and then an outcome will be determined.

In response to the wonderful volunteer participation and donations, Commissioner Riegel pointed out that the Veterans Homes are very lucky, because those in private industry do not enjoy those assets.

### **Lewiston Veterans Home Operations Report:**

The Lewiston Home continues to have ZERO Agency hours, as has been the pattern for the past THREE YEARS!

Currently, receipts at the Lewiston Home are on target and Clark Graebel reports that their census is good. Currently there are 58 residents in the Lewiston Home, with eight (8) applicants being processed. The admission process is taking approximately two weeks at this time, but the staff is working to decrease that time and get residents processed in and situated more quickly.

Meal costs are decreasing as a direct result of the food convoys. The 17<sup>th</sup> Lewiston group donated 8250.49 pounds in food, and cash of \$3,503.22. Clark reports that like the other Homes, the Lewiston Home had several special meals during the past quarter—4<sup>th</sup> of July, Grilled Trout (from the residents fishing trips, which Clark grills himself), Hawaiian Days, Round Up BBQ and Veterans Olympics.

Over the past quarter the kilowatt usage at the Lewiston Home has increased, and is probably twice or more than the other homes. The main reason for the increase in usage is the fact that the wall on the East Side of the bldg is gone. (As a result of renovation) This is in the process of being fixed, and once completed should result in a decrease in kilowatt use. The current cost per kilowatt hour is 5.8 cents per kilowatt hour, which is a big increase over the other homes.

On September 6, 2007, the BPFAC-Public Works Council came to Lewiston and toured the facility. Clark gave them a tour, showed past, current and future projects, and answered their questions. The Council was very interested in the home and what is happening there.

As Commissioner Riegel pointed out, the Veterans Homes are very fortunate in the amount of volunteer services they receive, and the Lewiston Home is no exception. Over the past quarter Clark has seen the volunteer hours climb from 1000 hours/month to 1700 hours/month. This increase is partially due to the summer months and all the extra time spent at the Home over the summer.

With great pride, Clark announced that the Lewiston Home is now offering After Hours Dining. This service is designed for the veteran that is impaired to the point that he cannot go out to eat with the family, but would like to have that dining experience. The Old Timers Café (primarily for housebound, but open to all) offers a place where the resident can invite up to 10 guests, who are seated in a separate section, and are provided with china/crystal/hostess/waitress/entertainers. The first dinner is planned for February 29, 2008. Plans were to open sooner, but due to the fact that all of the contract work that was supposed to have already been done (10/5/07) will not be done until February, the opening has been postponed!

Clark has spoken with DPW about the contractor and all of the issues that have plagued the projects. DPW is aware of the problems.

Commissioner Riegel asked for clarification: didn't District 2 put on the June BBQ and then District 1 do the August? Clark affirmed that correction. Commissioner Riegel furthered commented that he was very proud to be associated with the Veterans Homes and the efforts of all those who work at and maintain them. Commissioner Riegel has the opportunity to bring some people down to the homes for the first time and some of who were very reluctant (wives) because of their preconceived notions. Once there, and seeing first hand what the Veterans Homes are about, they were all very happy and

changed their impression. Clark commented that they have a motto: “Clean Does Not Stink”

Jim Adams furthered the comments on the subject of condition of homes by reporting that at a recent committee meeting, Sen. Darrington commented about what a pleasure it was to visit each home and to see that the DPW money being expended is being well used. Mike Gwartney, Dept of Admin, further commented that when he visited there were two residents in wheelchairs sitting by the front door, facing each other, holding hands, and how wonderful it was to see that!!!

As part of the Veterans Day Ceremony on November 12, 2007, there will be a dedication of the “I’m An American” statue outside the Lewiston Home. This statue was funded with over \$80,000 that was collected from people all over Idaho/Washington.

### **Boise Veterans Home Operations Report:**

James Roberts reported that the past quarter had been both challenging and interesting, due to the Medicaid process, but that progress is being made.

As the report shows, James reported that the Boise Home collected nothing in August and September. This was a direct result of the Medicaid recalculation of reimbursement rates, going back to 2005 and 2006. The rebilling of all of these accounts has been very labor intensive, but is almost completed. During this time, all money that should have been receipted by the home has been recouped by Medicare, resulting in the zero collection report. This is being corrected and the money will be coming soon. Fortunately, the Boise Home has funds in reserve, so there has not been a major concern about meeting operating costs. (James was just handed an urgent note, and with great joy announced that the Boise Home Just received a check for \$591,470.17!)

Part of the billing problem has to do with issues with past office staff and them not fully understanding how to bill. This misunderstanding has resulted in some numbers not matching, causing the claims to be kicked out. Marta Evans, who was hired to help sort this issue out, is in the process of clearing those accounts and that money is still to come. Thanks to all of Marta’s diligence and dedication, the Boise Home now has a wonderful paper trail that makes the Home audit tight, and there will be no way to question the integrity of the accounts. This whole issue has helped drive home the benefit of stability in staff.

Occupancy has taken a small dip. Mary Floyd left to go to work at Facility Standards. Sarah Yoder, AIT, has moved into that role and is learning quickly. Things are looking up and getting better. Background is Occupational Therapy—medical, which helps in the admissions process as she makes connections. Challenge to her, get occupancy up to 100% (?). She has accepted and will work towards that goal.

James reported that the maintenance projects within the Boise Home are all on track. The elevator project is completed, and the elevator is running. Joyce Ritchie cut the ribbon and everyone took an elevator ride to the basement and back up. This project was completed by Gollis Contractors, who did a wonderful job and finished ahead of schedule. The Annex employees displaced during the elevator renovation should be able to move back into the Annex in about a week. The Maintenance Shop is going up quickly, and should be done on time or a bit early.

Once again the pharmacy numbers are a bit skewed. There is still a large credit on the McKesson account, which allows the business office to apply current charges to the credit, thus not expending funds. This credit is almost used up, so James predicts more accurate pharmacy numbers will be reported during the next quarter.

Over the month of July Boise experienced record breaking heat, which resulted in the energy expenses being up. However, with the other months coming in at or below normal, the overall energy expenses still remain constant.

The Boise Home has also seen an increase in volunteer hours. During the past quarter volunteer hours totaled 10,840. Part of this increase was due to the 700 volunteers who participated in the Veterans Olympics. Overall, the Boise Home continues to have a very dedicated and hard working volunteer pool.

James corrected the quarterly report, noting that the Nursing PPD should show a 3.2 average. The Boise Home is struggling to keep enough nursing staff, primarily night shift RN positions. This shortage is resulting in an increase agency hours. Currently there are 6-7 C.N.A. positions open, and the Boise Home has not been able to fill them. James also reported that the Boise Home has hired a new scheduling technician, Scott Houde. With Scott's help with scheduling, the turnover rate should decrease.

Unfortunately, the Boise Home has lost some key employees over the past quarter. The RN Manager left to follow husband; Randy Goss, the Staff Development Coordinator, left to take care of his parents; Mary Floyd went to licenses and certifications; and Larry Gammel left to work for Idaho Youth Ranch as their main maintenance person. Sarah Yoder, the AIT, has taken over the Admissions position, and Dave Challe was promoted to the Maintenance Supervisor position, which has been a very nice, positive change. James informed the Commission that he firmly believes it is important to promote within and keep good people, which is what he has tried to do with these key positions.

The Boise Home recently went through their Survey, and received one of the best reports ever. This report reiterates the fact that the Boise Home is maintaining a high standard of care, even with decreased staff.

The Annual Satisfaction Survey was sent out to residents and family members. Thirty-five residents responded, 95% reporting satisfaction, while fifty-four families responded with a 98% satisfaction rate. This rate was an increase over the past surveys.

The Medicare Application is almost completed. James updated the Commission on the last few hurdles that are being tackled—proof of ADA requirements being met and the installation of a Hearing Impaired TTD phone line. As soon as these two items are completed, James will hand deliver proof to LLC and they will forward them on, clearing the way for the implementation of Medicare. Jim Adams added that since it has been many years since a Medicare application has been filed, and all of the people who knew the process have left, which is probably why we are running into these last minute hurdles, but everything should be done soon.

Commissioner Pitcher was concerned about turnaround time and getting payments from Medicare. James Roberts and Clark Graebel both indicated that they did not foresee this as being a problem, partly because at the beginning most of the initial Medicare charges will be from residents returning from hospital care, so there shouldn't be a huge onslaught of charges. Additionally, James indicated that the normal turn around time is about 15 days.

Commissioner Thurlow wanted to know if any of the small colleges in the Boise area (APOLLO, BSU, etc) do any of their training within the Boise Home. James reported that Apollo College does use the Boise Home for some of their training. Commissioner Thurlow followed up with an inquiry about an in-house C.N.A. training program within the Boise home. James indicated that this is still a viable option, and it has been discussed. However, in order to provide this service the Boise Home will have to provide a full time trainer (which requires a PCN) and they must meet state regulations for classroom space, etc. James will meet with Suzanne Kress, DNS and explore this option further.

### **Idaho State Veterans Cemetery Operations Report:**

As the new Director of the State Veterans Cemetery, Zach Rodriguez updated the Commission on happenings at the Cemetery. This past quarter there have been 43 internments, about 80 pre-registration forms have been sent out over the past month and they are being returned routinely, the Plot Allowance Reimbursement is currently running about a month behind and the Volunteer group at the Cemetery are working with Zach, helping him better understand their role and how he can better assist them. The Warm Summer Days Show and Shine, the car show that collected funds for the Cemetery during Eagle Fun Days, has donated just under \$3000.00 to the indigent fund.

Since taking over, Zach has generated several “targeted” mailings. One of these mailings has gone out to the local funeral homes, outlining the rules and regulations of the Cemetery so to assure everyone is up-to-date on policy. A second mailing has gone out to veterans, asking them to fill out the pre-registration forms, and these have been well received and many have been returned. Zach is also working on getting Certificates of Appreciation out to all those who have helped the Cemetery.

The construction at the new Visitors Center has been completed. The Grand Opening Ribbon Cutting Ceremony is set for October 5, 2007. Anyone wishing to attend is invited to do so.

This years Missing In America program is scheduled for November 9, 2007, beginning at 11:00 a.m. Currently there are 16 cremains scheduled to be to be placed. The quest to identify additional cremains will continue, and those retrieved after this years ceremony will be honored at the 2008 ceremony.

The new security system is in place and should be active by the end of October. With the new system the cameras are mounted outside, not inside, and are able to focus in on the smallest of details (i.e. licenses plate numbers). Commissioner Thurlow wanted to know if these cameras were monitored during closed hours. Zach explained that the cameras are motion sensitive, thus don't need to be monitored by a person, and they will record all movement. Additionally, they are set up so that Zach can access them from home allowing him to report any suspicious activity right away. An added benefit of this system will be Darin Sorenson's (Landscape Foreman) ability to monitor the irrigation system from home, which will alert him to malfunctions. As the Cemetery lost all of the roses in the Star garden due to lack of water, this will be a benefit and cost saving measure.

Zach informed the Commission that the North Idaho Cemetery has been put on hold. This is a direct result of the State of Washington being awarded their Spokane area cemetery. Focus for the second Idaho cemetery will now shift to Eastern Idaho. Commissioner Riegel brought up the fact that the Commissioners had voted to have their Commission paychecks donated to the North Idaho Cemetery fund and wanted to know what happens to that money now. Jim Adams announced that a letter will be going out to all those who donated to that fund, asking them which option they would like to exercise: 1. leave the money in the fund for the Eastern Idaho cemetery; 2. move the money into the indigent fund; or 3. have their donation returned to them. Once their response is received, the money will be handled accordingly. Commissioner Riegel wanted to know if the Commissioners needed to make a motion to move their money or just answer the letter. Jim thought it would be a good idea for the Commissioners to make a motion, but suggested that instead of specifying a geographic area (Eastern Idaho) that the motion is to give the money to Idaho Veterans Cemetery 2. Commissioner Pitcher moved that all of the funds that the Commissioners had donated to the Northern Idaho Cemetery be transferred to the Idaho Veterans Cemetery 2 fund. Commissioner Thurlow seconded the motion. A vote was held; Commissioner Richardson abstained as he sends a personal check direct to IVAL. The motion passed.

Commissioner Richardson asked about the balance in the indigent fund and how many internments have been paid for from this fund, and wanted to know why that balance is never reported on the quarterly reports. Zach pointed out that this balance is on the front page of the quarterly report, and informed the Commission that Phil Hawkins is the person responsible for administering this fund. Zach indicated that he will contact Phil

before the next Commission meeting and get the information about number of burials being paid for from this fund.

Commissioner Richardson asked for an update on the problems with skateboarders at the Cemetery. Zach passed this off to Tom Ressler, as he had knowledge of the issue. Tom informed the Commission that these kids were actually using a luge board to go down the hill, and when they were told to stop, they made comments about it not being posted (it had been, but the signs had all been removed). Eventually the police were called, and the parents came to pick up their kids. One of the fathers came back and asked Zack to explain to him what had happened. The next day, that father brought all the kids back and made them apologize to all staff members, and assured the staff this wouldn't happen again because he had personally cut the luge board in half! Tom regretted having to call the police, but the kids were so disrespectful he didn't feel like there was any other choice.

Commissioner Richardson wanted to know about the shooting range that is being proposed out in the cemetery area. David Brasuell informed the Commission that Zach, Jim Adams and himself had gone to the public hearing and along with many other community members. As a result of the opposition, the issue has been tabled until November 14th and the Ada County Sheriff has been told to find an alternative location, which they are looking for. Commissioner Richardson commented that the county has property out at Seamans Gulch, which would be a good place for consideration.

Jim Adams informed the Commission that as a result of a conversation between Commissioner Richardson and First Lady Lori Otter, a check for \$1200.00 was given to Zach to purchase bricks for every fallen Idaho soldier Killed in Action. Commissioner Richardson suggested that a letter be sent to Lori acknowledging her commitment to this matter. Jim assured him that one would be drafted and sent to each of the Commissioners for their signature.

### **Office of Veterans Advocacy Operations Report:**

Things at the Office of Veterans Advocacy are going well. Tom was pleased to inform the Commission that the number of office interviews has increased, while the number of claims dropped a bit in September. However, with the return of the 321<sup>st</sup> Army Reserve, Tom anticipates that number will climb back up, especially since this outfit lost three of their own while being deployed. Additionally, there have been considerably fewer Decision Office Review hearings, which may be due to the Service Officers doing a better job of getting all the information, looking the claims over better, explaining the CFR, and then moving accordingly. OVA does not adjudicate claims, so if a veteran wants to file the claim, there is nothing OVA can do to stop them. However, if the review of the case indicates the claim probably won't be favorable, they will do everything they can to try and dissuade the veteran from filing. In the recent months both Gina Stamper and Jacques Chung-Hee have had great success with claims and have won

a couple large amounts. Gina's success story will be in the national VFW newspaper in October/November.

Home visits are up, and Tom believes this is partly due to the fact that Veterans want to stay in their homes as long as they can, using in-home care, while others are housebound and have no other choice. In an unusual request, Tom met with a veteran who is currently at the Idaho State Prison. This is not something that is usually done but due to the need for this veteran to come into the VA hospital immediately upon release, he went and met with him.

The annual Service Officer School was held at the Double Tree Inn, in Boise. Tom reports that it went very well and even with the American Legion Convention being at the same time, attendance was good. Overall there were about 70 participants, down four from last year. One of the changes this year was the participation of representatives from the WallaWalla, Spokane, Salt Lake City and Boise VAMC. Plans are in place to get a representative from the National Records Center from St. Louis to attend next year.

VFW training and AL training is ongoing. During July and August, three service officers went to Annapolis for training, and six went to Phoenix for VFW training. In September Gina, Jacques and Tom will go to Phoenix for the VFW training. Retired VA employees are now being used to teach classes, which is a great improvement. The testing has also changed a bit. Participants will continue to test each year at the end of the VFW and AL training, but they will then need to re-certify every five years.

The 2007 Homeless Stand-Down in Boise was held September 29<sup>th</sup>. This year there were 239 total participants, with 110 of them veterans. These numbers were up from last year. All those in attendance were provided with services from a dentist, a hygienist and a barber, and all received clothing, food and various other items. This was a great success. Plans are in the works to try and hold a smaller version of the Stand-Down in the Nampa/Caldwell area.

The ongoing "remodel" of the OVA offices is about completed. Thanks to a suggestion from James Roberts, the Boise Home OVA office is undergoing some changes to make the Annex building more accessible and usable. These changes should be done in the next week or two, after which the OVA staff can move out of the resident rooms they've been occupying and back into their own space. These changes were all done internally, resulting in no additional costs. The Lewiston Home OVA offices are another story. It appears that construction there is happening one board a day! Tom was not even willing to guess when it might be completed.

Plans are still in place for Gina Stamper to spend one day a month at the Caldwell CBOC office to do outreach. There has been some confusion as to who authorized this, but Tom reports that he now has a handshake agreement with the new VA Director, Dwayne Hamlin, for Gina to start doing outreach at the Caldwell CBOC, and that will start soon. Dave Brasuell reported that in S. Carolina the new CBOC had a place for service officers.



Commissioner Richardson inquired as to if the outreach programs in small towns are still taking place, and if so, how does the word get out that the service office will be there on a specific date? Tom explained that the service offices are responsible for getting the word out in the areas they cover and they use the county service officer to help get the word out, may place ads in papers, or may have set dates and times each month that the community is aware of. Commissioner Richardson reported that he had been contacted by an Adams County Commissioner (Judy???) who was concerned that her area was not getting serviced. According to her, she had absolutely no idea what service officers and outreach programs were about or when they happened. Tom assured Commissioner Richardson that Jacques Chung-Hee does go to the Council area, but Tom wasn't sure that the area has an active county service officer, which may be part of the reason the County Commissioner was unaware of the program. Commissioner Richardson said that the AL and VFW are both very active in the Council area, and the County Commission gives them \$4000/mth for veterans and a building. Tom agreed and said he believed the building Jacques uses for his visits is the one the Commission helps fund. Commissioner Richardson suggested that Jacques meet face to face with the County Commissioners (especially this one) and let them know who he is, what he does, and when he plans to be in their area. Tom agreed, and said he would have Jacques make that contact.

Commissioner Riegel wanted to know if a decision had been made as to where the new Northern Idaho area clinic was going to be placed. Tom reported that at the August service office school the Spokane Hospital Administration reported that nothing had been determined yet.

Tom thanked the Commissioners for their support of the service officers in Northern Idaho.

### **Division of Veterans Services Operations Report:**

David Brasuell attended the NASDVA conference in Annapolis, Maryland in September, and he provided the Commission with a handout of notes/points of interest that came from that conference.

Currently there are four open Commissioner positions and Dave reported that to date he has received about four applications. These will be reviewed and forwarded on to the Governor's Office, where the decision of who to place on the Commission will be made.

As reported by James and Brent, the Medicare process is moving forward, and should be completed soon. While in Annapolis Dave spoke with the other states that currently have Medicare approval and they all assured him that this will be the best move ever made.

There has been talk of establishing a Tele-Psych unit in the Salmon area. In August, Dave spoke with the administrator, Dave Hamlin, about not building a new infrastructure, but instead using the existing hospital facility in that area and expanding that facility

instead of building something new. Dave Hamlin agreed with Dave's idea and said he would take it back to the administration staff and see what they thought.

While at a training session in Washington, Dave received some pin and coins that support veterans. The pins - I SUPPORT VETERANS – are an item Dave would like to look into getting, and possibly have them sold by IVAL as a fund raiser. Dave would also like to have some of these pins in his pocket during the Legislative Session so he could hand them out to the legislators and those who support the veterans. This is an item that many other states are using, and Dave plans to begin doing so in Idaho.

While last year was the year of the contract, this year will be the year of the contractor. Starting immediately, there will be several projects starting, and many contractors on sight. Dave reported that DPW is ready to assign the architect for the arctic winter doors, nursing station and kitchen projects. These are all being combined together to allow for a bigger, better contract.

Dave reported that plans are in the works to try and acquire an additional 40 acres at the cemetery. With the help of Mitch, Zach is working on this and will keep the Commission updated as things progress.

All three of the Idaho Veterans Homes have undergone Surveys in the past year, and all have done really well. Dave pointed out that part of the reason our Homes do so well is that our State system is more stringent than the VA system, thus our standards are higher. Many other states struggle with their surveys, some extensively, but not Idaho. The problems many facilities experience are due in part to training issues and the lack of good leadership. Fortunately, these are not problems in Idaho.

There are plans in the work to develop at least one (and possibly two or three) Scratch Lottery Tickets that will benefit the Veterans. Dave and Jim Adams have met with the Lottery Commission and have learned that the inception of new games does not have to go through the legislature for approval. The money received will be put into a fund that the Administrator of Division of Veterans Services will have discretion over. These funds are to be used to purchase items the Homes need, like hi/low beds, lifts, etc. Dave and Jim are working on getting the design for the first game started. The timeframe from design to implementation is about six months.

In the past, several legislative proposals have been submitted, and many of them have died without any action. The reason for this is usually too many requests. Therefore, this year the Division decided to only submit two proposals. The first is the inclusion of a check off box on state income tax returns that would allow the tax payer to donate a portion of their refund to the Division, and the second is a \$500.00 tax credit for military retirees in Idaho. Each of these proposals has made it through the Division of Financial Management and the Legislative Services Office, and has been signed off by the Governor. Commissioner Thurlow wanted to know what the anticipated fiscal impact of the tax credit is. Jim advised the Commission that there are 11,500 veterans retired in

Idaho, about 50% of those are over 65, which means none of their retirement is taxable, so there are only about 5000 veterans who would benefit from the \$500 credit. This equates to about \$3.5 million. However, if the legislature looks at the income that these veterans bring into Idaho, about \$7.5 million, this credit shouldn't be a big deal. Commissioner Thurlow commented that she is concerned about the ability for this to pass because even though not a significant amount, it will be an issue for JFAC since it is for veterans and not a priority. Jim added that he receives several phone calls a month from veterans inquiring about benefits in the State of Idaho. Their major concerns are tax deductions and education benefits, and what is provided often dictates where they go. Jim also pointed out that many veterans are entrepreneurs, and when they start their businesses they hire people, bring in goods & services, etc, so that's an additional financial bonus for the State. Dave added that it is his goal to try and incrementally improve veteran's benefits in Idaho, which is important since Idaho is near the bottom when it comes to benefits offered to Veterans.

Jim has drafted an Executive Order for Governor Otter to sign that states the POW/MIA flag will fly over all state buildings, 365 days per year. The Governor will sign this in the next few weeks and it will be effective immediately.

The Division is preparing for the upcoming legislative session, and JFAC presentation. The Governor has announced that he will be looking at pay and retention issues, as the State of Idaho is 14-16% below market.

The Division, with the help of Tammy Hebdon, is in the process of developing their COOP Plan. COOP, Continuation of Operations Plan, is a written plan that outlines what the Division and the Homes will do if a catastrophic incident were to happen. Within the next month or so there will be a directive issued by the Governor mandating all State agencies to have a COOP plan in place. In anticipation of this, the Division has started putting their together. Tammy will work with each Home to develop their plan, and then all will be combined together for the Division policy. Dave was able to obtain some useful information from North Carolina and this will be used to help develop our plan.

Jim handed out the new Veterans Benefits pamphlet that the Division office created and asked for feedback from the Commission. Plans are to change the format from a four-fold to a half page/book style, making it easier to read. Dave brought some examples back from Annapolis, and they will be use to help direct the Division pamphlet.

There have been some issues with people not receiving emails that have been sent. Jim will send a test email out, and asked the Commissioners to please check their emails when they return home open the email he has sent and send a return message so he can assure that all info/address are correct. If the email is not received, Jim asked that the Commissioners please let him know that as well.

Jim thanked Commissioner Riegel for all of his assistance with the North Idaho cemetery. Unfortunately, Idaho was behind the eight ball and didn't know it.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

There are three Commissioners whose terms are due to expire: Commissioner Thurlow, Commissioner Pitcher and Commissioner Richardson. Commissioner Riegel asked each if they planned to submit their resume to Governor Otter for consideration for re-appointment. Commissioner Pitcher informed Commissioner Riegel that he had already submitted his resume; Commissioner Thurlow said she planned to submit her resume for consideration for re-appointment and Commissioner Richardson informed the Commission that he would not be seeking re-appointment.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

Commissioner Riegel noted that many of the upcoming events (i.e. ribbon cutting at the Cemetery) are not being communicated to the Commissioners, and asked that they please be informed of these activities so, if possible, they can attend.

Tom Ressler reminded the Commission that there are several events planned for the week of Veterans Day:

November 9<sup>th</sup> - Missing In America Ceremony, Idaho State Veterans Cemetery

November 10<sup>th</sup> - Veterans Day Parade, Boise. Starts at 10:00a.m.

November 11<sup>th</sup> - Veterans Day Ceremony, Boise Veterans Home, 11:00a.m.

James Roberts wanted to let the Commission know that Phil Hawkins has been working very hard with the Beds for Vets Program. This program receives donations that are used to replace beds at the Veterans Homes. To date, Phil has received \$13,000 in donations, and several beds have been replaced.

James also reported that IVAL received a \$10,000 donation from the estate of a lady whose husband was cared for by the Boise Home. She was so grateful for the care her late husband received that she donated 1/3 of her estate to the Boise Home.

Dave Brasuell informed the Commission that the Tri-State Women's Veterans Conference will be held in Oregon in April, 2008. The Conference is looking for someone (a veterans group) or a corporate sponsor that is willing to help sponsor one of the lunches. It is estimated that they will need about \$5000. Each state is sponsoring a meal, and will provide each participant with a small trinket from the sponsoring state. John Lee, Washington State, Jim Willis, State of Oregon, and David Brasuell, Idaho, will be opening speakers.

Commissioner Richardson let the Commission know that the ground is soon to be broken on the new pavilion in the Veterans Memorial Park in Boise. This pavilion will be dedicated to Wake Island/Pearl Harbor Survivors. The Ada County United Veterans Council will be purchasing a monument (plaque, stone, etc) that will be permanently

installed as construction begins. Plans are in place to contact WGI (they took over MK, who had 28 employees parish in Wake Island), to make a donation in memory of those who did survive.

Commissioner Thurlow wanted to know the status on legislation being proposed by Veterans Organizations, and if the Commission was planning to support any of the proposals. Jim Adams informed Commissioner Thurlow that there was only one (1) legislative proposal this year, being proposed by the DAV. The DAV's proposal concerns obtaining free admission into all state parks for disabled veterans, and this proposal already has the endorsement of Idaho Parks and Recreation, and appears to be well on it's way to passage.

**Next Meeting:**

The next IVAC Meeting will be held January 9, 2008, in Boise, at the Idaho State Veterans Home. The Legislative Reception will be held the following night, January 10, 2008, at the Owyhee Plaza.

As there was no further business, Commissioner Pitcher moved that the meeting be adjourned; Commissioner Richardson seconded the motion.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.